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There is a conspiracy of silence in our culture, the purpose of which is to prevent people from discovering that love is hard work. On the basis of the data available, it is apparent that popular culture regards love as a mystical, ethereal phenomenon which strikes without warning leaving its victim stunned, speechless and light-headed. Other data suggest that love is uncontrollably glandular, "hormones calling to hormones" someone recently described it. Nowhere is love celebrated as "hard work".

But it is. Parents try to tell that to young people who are beginning to look starry-eyed at each other. You know the rhetoric: you've probably recited it, as a variation on the theme, several times. And somewhere in the middle ages you heard it. It goes like this..."I know just how you feel. But feelings aren't enough. Someday your feelings will change and then what will you do?" What you do, of course, is go to work at it. People who have been married creatively and vitally know it, and want desperately to tell newlyweds that happiness and life-long relationships are a culmination of a number of factors, some of which may be out of our control. But one factor is common, and that is hard work: the will, the determination, to love - particularly when the feeling has disappeared for the moment.

Time Magazine carried a feature article recently on a new organization called "Tough Love". Founded by Psychologists David and Phyllis York, the basic idea of Tough Love is simple: when dealing with children who are constantly in trouble, understanding and forgiveness may be laudable, but they do not work. Tough Love sets standards, draws the bottom line and sticks to it.

At a workshop on Substance Abuse recently I heard a psychologist suggest criteria for parents who want to deal with drug and alcohol use. The first criteria, he said, was the willingness to be disliked by your own children. There were a few nervous chuckles and then the room became very quiet as he said: "The trouble with all you professional people is that you feel guilty about your children. You worry about not spending enough time with your children, you analyze your own parenting performance and you feel guilty. And you have a very hard time making decisions that will cause your children to be unhappy and perhaps even to dislike you."

Love is beautiful. Love makes the world go round. Love is a many splendored thing. It is also very hard work.

The lawyer who came to see Jesus wanted to embarass Him, to discredit Him, in fact, in the eyes of the people who were following Him. From the very moment He entered Jerusalem the religious and legal authorities had dogged His steps, harassing Him, interrupting Him, asking difficult, loaded questions. "Which is the great commandment in the law?" the Pharisee asked. There was really very little Jesus could say except, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind." Everybody knew that. But then He pulled an obscure verse out of the book of Leviticus and, in the process, opened the door to a whole range of possibilities... "A second is like it...You shall love your neighbor as yourself...These two are the essence of our religion."

Abstractions inspire: the specifics give us trouble. Who could argue with the admonition to love God with heart, mind and soul, the theological equivalent of motherhood and apple pie? Jesus, however, moved the focus from safe abstraction to

of 3,000 former CETA workers. The general unemployment rate in Franklin County is over 6%. That means that there are no jobs for those 3,000 people. At the same time there are fewer dollars to feed and house them and the prospects of tighter welfare eligibility regulations. Worst of all, there is a new social respectability to ignoring the problem, assuming that the poor should and can take care of themselves. James Reston caustically observed last week that we are guilty of asking people to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps who have no straps and no boots.

If the Old Testament were being written today the plight of those 3,000: the dilemma of the men standing around on the corners up and down Main Street, Long Street, Livingston Avenue, Mt. Vernon Avenue, would be the subject matter. If Jesus were composing parables the cruel dilemma of people not very far from here would be the focus.

Love is hard work. Love defined by Jesus is practical, down to earth, help for people who need help.

There is another dimension to the matter. On a personal level love has to do with the way you and I feel about ourselves. "Love your neighbor as yourself," He said. Over the long pull we have almost as much trouble with that self-love business as we do loving the neighbor in need.

Christianity, historically, has been very suspicious of the self. Sin, we have been taught, is pride, thinking more highly of oneself than we ought to think; making ourselves the center of the universe. Sin, we were taught, is unbridled selfishness, egotism. Liturgically we have confessed sin as a prerequisite to the rest of worship. Psychologically we have acted as if the only good Christian is a guilty Christian.

One of the great theological developments in our era is the recovery of a little sanity about the self. Sin may be egotism, but we are finally learning that there is also a form of sin which results from low self-esteem. People, we are learning, often do bad things precisely because their self-image is bad. It was a struggle, but many of us who were weaned on the "sin is pride" doctrine, finally heard a new version of the Gospel when we read "I'm OK, You're OK". It wasn't easy, but we learned, finally, that low self-esteem doesn't look very pretty when it gets expressed behaviorally. We learned that vicious racism is often a partner of self-hatred. We finally saw that forcing people to lower the self-image is to invite their behavior to follow. Even parenting was graced by something called "positive reinforcement" which taught the obvious; namely, that no child ever acted better because parents made him feel bad about himself.

The only real danger in loving your neighbor as yourself, I conclude, is in not loving yourself nearly enough. You can't give something you don't have. In marriage, you can't give a self you don't value. Love, on all levels, depends entirely on the hard work of coming to terms with the self. Somewhere along the line we concluded that if humility is a virtue, self-abasement must be marvelous. Somewhere we concluded that the appropriate approach to most of the problems we encounter is that someone else is better prepared to resolve them, and that the appropriate response to all invitation to fill a position, serve as an officer, make a speech, is to decline on the basis of inadequacy. Somewhere along the line we got the idea that God is worried that we will think too highly of ourselves.

I am proposing the opposite. Jesus said, "Love your neighbor as yourself." And that assumes a self in there worthy of loving. Self-love doesn't mean fawning

the specific - He said, "Love your neighbor." He said, "Love your neighbor as yourself." And we have trouble with both, because both are "hard work".

The "love your neighbor" mandate is grounded in the theology and history of the Jewish people. In the Old Testament Lesson this morning religious responsibility is described in clearly social terms. The section of the Book Exodus is called the Book of the Covenant. It contains the rituals, rules, customs and responsibilities to one another which constitute Israel's part of the bargain. The treatment of the poor, the weak, the disinherited, occupies a special place in the list. To obey God is to treat them with special consideration. To take advantage of them, to exploit them, was to offend God. No abstractions here. God is honored, obeyed and worshipped rightly when poor people receive justice.

In the New Testament the same connection is made. God is not loved in the abstract, but as the neighbor - defined by Jesus as the person who needs you - is helped, healed, served. And if there is any misunderstanding of the issue the first Epistle of John, written around the turn of the First Century, ought to clear it up. "If a man says he loves God and hates his brother, he is a liar."

Love in the Biblical idiom is not an emotion, but an activity, a verb not a noun. Love, by Jesus' definition is something you do, not something you feel. God doesn't care how you feel about your neighbor. God, by Biblical definition, is a behaviorist. He cares about how you deal with your neighbor. A whole school of psychology is convinced that feelings follow behavior anyway and that the feeling of love follows loving behavior. The late Paul Tillich was helpful when he equated Biblical love with Justice. "Justice is nothing more, " he said, "than love at work in the world."

Our propensity to keep it abstract, to define love as feeling rather than activity, however, remains one of the critical issues for the institutional church. Swiss Roman Catholic theologian Hans Kung, in his recent book Does God Exist?, deals with the major objections to belief in God: Darwinism, Freudism, the philosopher Nietzche and a very helpful section on Marx. Karl Marx simply didn't know very much about religion: his views were unsophisiticated, childish. It was Lenin whose brother was executed in connection with the murder of Czar Alexander II, who passionately hated anything remotely connected with religion thereafter. Marx simply regarded the religion he saw as superfluous and assumed that it would disappear as its uselessness became evident. Kung suggests that "Marx never seriously came to terms with...the message of Jesus Christ and consequently was not at all familiar with the 'social principles of Christianity'." (p.254-5). Marx never even knew about Christian concern for poor people and justice. Kung isn't the only scholar to suggest that had institutional Christianity been vigorous about the social dimension of love, Marxism would never have had a prayer. Kung, and most scholars, are inclined to think that Marx's analysis of the religion he saw was accurate. "God," in Kung's words, "is often discredited by His followers."

The proper role for government in dealing with poor people, protecting rights and guaranteeing adequate food, shelter and medical care, is now under vigorous debate. People of good will, people who are committed to justice, disagree regarding the appropriate role for government to play. My concern is that we not stop working for it as the debate continues. My concern is that the Christians in our society not forget that justice for the poor is their baby, and that the political position that "Washington shouldn't do it"...does not relieve the society from dealing with its own problems. I don;t think we intend that, but it will take alert, sensitive, mature leadership to assure that it doesn't happen. Example: I understand that cut-backs in Federal Anti-poverty funds have resulted in the unemployment

(1) The official and the applicant shall make a good faith effort to resolve the dispute informally.

(2) Where the official and the applicant are unable to resolve the dispute informally within fourteen (14) days after the dispute arises, the applicant may request a hearing in writing, the hearing request to be submitted to the official.

§5.04 Board of Review: Hearings

(a) The board shall be composed of five (5) members of the Board of Trustees of the Corporation.

(1) Members of the board shall be elected by resolution of the Board of Trustees of the Corporation.

(2) The board shall be supervised by a Presiding Officer, elected by a majority vote of the board.

(b) Upon a determination by resolution of either the Board of Trustees of the Corporation or the board that a dispute is of public or great general interest or involves one or more questions of exceptional importance, the Board of Trustees of the Corporation shall sit as the board as to that dispute.

(c) The board shall convene within two weeks after the date of receipt by the chairperson of a written hearing request. Notice of the hearing shall be given to the complaining applicant in writing at least three days prior to the hearing date.

(d) The board shall adopt procedural rules for the conduct of hearings which are designed to achieve fairness for all parties. Hearings shall be open to the public and shall be cablecast when feasible.

(e) The decision of the board, after a fair hearing of the dispute, is final.

(f) The board may propose to the Board of Trustees of the Corporation changes in Part Five of these Regulations designed to improve the operation of public access.

over oneself. It means acknowledging one's uniqueness: simply coming to honest terms with the fact that God made you totally unique. There is nobody like you. The pattern on your finger tip is different from everyone else who ever lived. You and I are absolutely unique. Self-love begins when we acknowledge that, appreciate it, maybe even begin to enjoy it. It proceeds, then to an appreciation that along with unique finger prints and eye color, each of us has been given special gifts, skills, sensitivities, abilities that are unique to us. Self-esteem continues as we begin to enjoy who we are. Mature self-love doesn't overdo it, nor - by the same reasoning, under-do it. Mature self-love accepts limitations, failures, mistakes, perhaps even intentional meanness - but also sees goodness, kindness, potential for courage and grace.

What the Pharisee who asked the question missed, however, was the key to the whole transaction. The Christian word is not an ethical admonition. It is not even a sophisticated psychological analysis of the human condition. Rather it is the Good News, the Amazing Grace, that in Jesus Christ we are loved. The Pharisee didn't see that apparently. The essence of religion for him was keeping the rules. What he missed entirely was the very thing that attracted His disciples to Him; namely, the sense that in this man God's love for them was being lived out. That's why they followed Him and were willing to die for Him. That's what transformed people, made them over - the sense that they were loved strongly, creatively, by God himself.

Love is hard work. The command to love neighbor as self is terribly difficult. In fact, it is impossible, until we begin the process of learning how to love ourselves. And that, clearly, can happen only as we know ourselves to be loved.

To love neighbor as self is what it means to be a Christian. To know oneself loved of God is what we mean by salvation.

It is to be saved from the hell of a lifetime trying to prove self-worth, to earn self-esteem. It is to be graciously and marvelously free - free to be who we are: free to spend ourselves doing what our creator put us here to do - free to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Amen.

Eternal God, help us to see and know and accept Your love for us. Give us the grace to receive what You offer: and the strength to love our neighbors. In Jesus Christ our Lord,

Amen.